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The Conflict and Concord in Self-representation  
of Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth

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## Introduction

Frederick Douglass in concord with Sojourner Truth acknowledged their intersectional identities as symbols for Americans, African Americans as well as universal defenders of race and gender. Being a Northerner, Sojourner Truth provided conflict to this mindset of slavery being a Southern shame, distinctly setting her apart from her contemporary anti-slavery Black abolitionist companions, most of whom were escaped or freed slaves from the South – such as Frederick Douglass. As always in control of her imagining in public, Truth would allow reporting of her speaking and manners to denote Southern slavery ways, directly obfuscating the true Truth from the performative Truth. More conveniently to the Northern abolitionist consciences, Douglass, as a former Southern and fugitive slave, fit the white supremacist expectations of what slavery was – a supposedly peculiar Southern phenomenon.

Intriguingly, both of their freedoms, as such, were bought for them by kindly white patrons – a concord that paved way to their futures as symbolic race and gender barrier reforming representations. Truth having fairly uneventfully “walked away by day-light” (Truth 29) from her slavery into her freedom conflicts drastically with some of Douglass’s bloody recollections and the dangerous journey he undertook to escape to his freedom. Through their literal and psychological embodiments and contributions for their causes, Douglass and Truth concord in their aims to construct a representation that was to be used to advance African American subjectivity which had become lost in slavery’s objectification.

This dissertation will examine the various ways Douglass and Truth at times appear in conflict and concord not just with their representative roles in public, but also with their selves and each other. Douglass and Truth employed multiple tropes of self-representation in textual, visual and oral modes in order to create a new Black man- and womanhood, distinctly separate from nineteenth-century white paternalist, supremacist impositions. Through focusing on their carefully crafted autobiographical narratives, their composed photographic portraiture and finally through their differing styles of oratory, Douglass and Truth drive a new, evolving African American identity equal to whites. Their self-representations provided symbolic substance for African Americans of the nineteenth-century who were looking to emancipate “not only their bodies and souls but [also] the life of the mind and of the imagination” (Bernier and Lawson 9). However, through their self-representative acts Douglass and Truth were

often in conflict with the imposed roles expected of African Americans during their time.

The first chapter of this dissertation examines the textual self-representation of the two protagonists through their narratives. Frederick Douglass's second autobiography *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855) differed widely from his first *Narrative of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (1845) both in style and content, with adding 14 chapters to *Narrative's* original 11, detailing his life beyond his escape. Douglass separates *My Bondage* to two unequal parts – showing the growth and distance he had gained from Part I – Life as a Slave and his then current Part II – Life as a Freeman. Sojourner Truth's *Narrative of Sojourner Truth – A Northern Slave* (1850), skillfully ghostwritten by Olive Gilbert, appears more as a deliberate construction for propaganda for abolitionist cause, similarly to Douglass's first *Narrative*. Truth herself sold copies at various meetings and events to financially support herself, and only after her second narrative, the *Narrative of Sojourner Truth - A Bondswoman of Olden Time, With a History of Her Labors and Correspondence Drawn from her 'Book of Life'* (1875) Truth's own voice became manifest through the 'Book of Life'. This gave Truth's *Narrative* validation through testimonials published in newspapers, or in private correspondences and signatories. The added pieces came from her own scrapbooks of items she found important, and thus Truth represented herself through the words of others. Whereas Douglass was determined to bolster himself through adding an Appendix section of extracts from his own lectures – in word, reproducing his own public performances again in textual mode. These concluding sections to their second autobiographies exemplify their conflicting methods and purpose in crafting their portrayed selves.

The second chapter will focus on these conflicting concepts of self-representation as envisioned in their visual images. Prior to Douglass's and Truth's devotion to photography most Black portraits were of slaves' suffering and were used to propagate white agendas of either pro- or anti-slavery, often in the form of caricatures with exaggerated features, making African Americans non-human objects to be gazed at in order to determine her worth. An infamous contrast to Douglass's and Truth's empowering portraits is a photo series of from Louis Agassiz from 1850 (Wallis 40). The series which

[...] show[s] [...] seven southern slaves, men and women, largely naked [...] The individuals sit or stand facing the camera a directness and forthrightness that is at once

familiar and utterly strange. If it is a shock to see full frontal nudity in early American photography, it is even more surprising to see it without the trappings of shame of sexual fantasy. Here, the seated women calmly reveal their breasts, and the standing men are stark naked. But their attitudes are detached, unemotional, and workmanlike. In what seems to be a deliberate refusal to engage with the camera or its operator, they stare into the lens, their faces like masks, eyes glazed, and jaws clenched. (Wallis 40)

These objectified men and women were literally stripped of any personal agency they might possess, which Celeste-Marie Bernier termed becoming “a commodified spectacle” (*Characters of Blood* 288). As discussed with Figure 2, similarly with the objectified slave men and women in the series, Douglass directly engaged his voyeur by making them focus on his upper torso and face at the same time enacting the conflict his elegant appearance symbolizing his elevated status in society. Photography became for Truth and Douglass a means to perpetuate equality and commonality of all people as they inverted perpetuated differences between the whites and African Americans. Truth’s photographs together with Douglass’s are a significant contribution to the creating of a new Black man- and womanhood. As a visual representation of an African American woman Truth’s crafty manipulation of universally recognized symbols of femininity as well as, as in Figure 1, her clever use of setting, posture and outfits to symbolize a new place in society inserts social commentary and political message to her photos, as examined with Figure 2. Truth rebuffed being categorized as a commodity, to having her agency stripped away as slave women were stripped of clothing in the pseudoscientific explorations attempting to perpetuate racial stereotypes.

As much as Douglass’s and Truth’s portraits rebelled the white American supremacist strangle-hold, so did their oratory – with Truth’s personal sentiments wrapped in brevity of evangelical language against Douglass’s lengthy sanguinary doctrines. Douglass and Truth drew attention to the intersection of race and gender, their public and private personas, as Truth spoke spontaneously, drawing momentum from the heckling, hissing crowds seemingly as at ease as she did from her most ardent supporter. Conflictingly, Douglass preached his audience – white and black alike – at length in an effort to change the mentality of the nation rather than changing one law at a time. As abundant as Douglass is in his oratory legacy, in order to show Douglass’s performative ploys such as using his political acumen, biting satire as well as to exemplify his sanguinary rhetoric, speeches such as Douglass’s July 12, 1854 speech “The Claims of the Negro Ethnologically Considered”, his attack on white hypocrisy in

his “The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro” delivered July 5, 1852, and “The Future of Negro People of the Slave States” from 1862 are discussed in relation to Douglass’s dedication for improvement of the nation and his brethren. Concordantly, also Truth employed humor and incendiary content as she advocated for the improvement of the African Americans’ condition, though she more often wrapped her message within the woman’s rights envelope. Some of her most biting exemplary rhetoric is felt in the three speeches delivered over May 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, 1867 at the First Annual Meeting of the American Equal Rights Association in New York, as well as within the contested “Arn’t I a Woman” speech from 1851. In her speeches Truth proves her dedication to keeping things stirring after having broken the ice as she enfolded her speeches in evangelical metaphors and deliberately obfuscating self-deprecation. In her speech at the Woman’s Rights Convention in September 7, 1853, Truth ensures the focus is not only on women’s rights in general, but on the right of the African American women independent of the white woman or the Black man. The substance of her speeches proves her unyielding efforts to reform the mentalities and subvert perpetuated ideologies and puts her once again in concord with Douglass.

Through the discussion on narratives, speeches and portraits chosen for this dissertation, I will examine Douglass and Truth converse to these disturbing caricatures, recognizing Truth and Douglass as symbols of imposing a new Black man- and womanhood, inverting imposed slavery identities, subverting white supremacist prejudices as they are employed in concord and conflict with one another and the white supremacist, paternalist expectation.

## 1. Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth: Independence Through Narratives

Frederick Douglass's second autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855 – hereafter referred to as *My Bondage*) reveals Douglass's own voice and style that conflict with his hailed first version *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845 – hereafter referred to as *Narrative*). Not until Sojourner Truth's second narrative, the *Narrative of Sojourner Truth - A Bondswoman of Olden Time with a History of Her Labors and Correspondence Drawn from her "Book of Life"* (1875 – hereafter referred to as *Narrative*), as aptly renamed by her second scribe Frances Titus, we begin to dissect agency of Truth from the ghostwritten text. This opening is through the inclusion of the 'Book of Life'; pieces from Truth's lovingly collated scrapbook. As recognized by Celeste-Marie Bernier in the Introduction to Douglass's *Narrative*, together they were key figures among the "pioneers of slave narrative genre [aimed to] convert white mainstream audiences to the abolitionist cause" (13). They became the "bodies of evidence and objects of proof rather than [...] personal, fallible, and individualized human beings" (14) on the pages of their narratives, and in the unfolding chapter explores how these versions of life's stories of Douglass and Truth live in conflict and concord with their representations of themselves in textual mode.

Frederick Douglass's first *Narrative* was published to critical and personal acclaim, yet it was but "one among many stand-alone narratives authored by hundreds of formerly enslaved and self-emancipated writers living across the Atlantic world" (Douglass, *Narrative* 11). The core Douglass's two autobiographies are distinctly different from one another; from the paratexts of the frontispiece and introductions to the appendices, to the pivotal passages Douglass expanded and analyzed within his second narrative. It was *My Bondage* where Douglass first expressed himself seemingly unrestrained by the imposed white confines. Douglass replaced the proffered white authentication of his first *Narrative* with his own voice as the including editor's preface, as well as including a new introduction, now by the revered Dr. James M'Cune Smith. Thus, *My Bondage* became a black book in a black envelope, distinctly separate from the white wash Douglass felt was placed on his words in the first *Narrative*. William Lloyd Garrison's preface fronting the *Narrative* appropriates Douglass's story in order to promote abolitionist goals through provocative exclamations, whereas M'Cune Smith emphasized Douglass's qualities as the "Representative American man – a type of his countrymen" (Douglass, *My Bondage* 19), putting Douglass in concord of other notable

men of his time. In his Introduction, M'Cune Smith substantiates Douglass-the-person beyond Douglass-the-abolitionist-exhibit-object, which enabled Douglass to develop his own sense of worth and to reclaim his agency as his own, as he began to detach from being used as the "text" (Douglass, *My Bondage* 287) for white-led abolitionism. Subsequently, Douglass demoted his first autobiography, minimalizing its merits by referring to it as a "pamphlet" (292); abolitionist propaganda handed out at meetings in order to spread the movement's message.

After publishing his *Narrative*, Douglass travelled Great Britain where he felt freer than he had thus far in his life in America. From his travels, Douglass wrote to Garrison, expressing how "I seem to have gone through a transformation. I live a new life" (296), evidencing a turning point in his confidence, as he was growing more in concord of his abilities. As this new sense of confidence was dawning on him, Douglass wrote;

I have no end to serve, no creed to uphold, no government to defend; and as to nation, I belong to none. I have no protection at home, or resting-place abroad. The land of my birth welcomes me to her shores only as a slave, and spurn with contempt the idea of treating me differently [...] That men should be patriotic, is to me perfectly natural; and as a philosophical fact, I am able to give it an intellectual recognition. But no farther can I go. (295)

Douglass's disenchantment with American politics and the supposed equality and liberty of all men was palpable. Yet he felt "men should be patriotic", as he later affirmed; "I felt I had a duty to perform – and that was, to labor and suffer with the oppressed in my native land" (391). Douglass felt himself American, despite the freedom Great Britain could offer him, he felt he was needed more back home. As Bernier explains, Douglass had become increasingly conscious and vigilant "against any attempts by white patrons, sponsors, political radicals, and general audiences to script, censor, or edit either his life or his testimony" (Douglass, *Narrative* 21), be it on page or on a podium. Douglass was conscious of how "just as there were white overseers on slave plantations who sought to deny Black freedoms, so too were there white overseers on the abolitionist podium equally dedicated to circumscribing Black free will" (46). With this notion, Douglass recognized himself a tool, a physical exhibit of slavery, rather than an advocate on equal stance with the white men he shared the podium with. In conflict, in *My Bondage*, Douglass "display[ed] his newfound independence and his almost uncanny promotional instincts [...] to publicize his talents



as a black leader and speaker” (Levine 76), as he could no longer be “as a man, a strategist, and a voice [...] contained within any one ideological camp” (Douglass, *My Bondage* xvii). The ideological camp he was separating from was that from the William Lloyd Garrison’s form of pacifism and his feeling of inaction. Douglass refocused from the wait-and-see-type Garrisonianism in favor of advocating for direct conflict, rebel action if need be. Thus, with *My Bondage* Douglass had published his declaration of independence (Noguchi 2).

Douglass’s experiences in Britain and Ireland were a catalyst to his declarations of authorial independence for it no longer “entirely satisfied [him] to *narrate* wrongs; [he] felt like *denouncing* them” (Douglass, *My Bondage* 289; emphases in original). Once again separating himself from the role as the text for the cause, Douglass began to rediscover his Black heroic masculinity, asserting his agency as he

already saw [himself] wielding [his] pen, and building up a public sentiment which should, at least, send slavery and oppression to the grave and restore to ‘liberty and pursuit of happiness’ the people with whom [he] had suffered, both as a slave and as a freeman.” (315)

*My Bondage* gave space for Douglass’s to express thoughts such as above, that were openly in conflict of how he had thus far been exhibited by the abolitionists. Even the very title claims possessiveness to his new life with the repetitive possessive “my” as opposed to the indefinite “an American slave” (Noguchi 2). Bernier illuminates how

for Douglass, living the life in freedom, the overwhelming trauma of his enslavement subsequently lost its basis in “stern reality”, due to his psyche’s determination to relegate it to a dreamlike status and thereby take the edge off his exposure to unimaginable pain. (Douglass, *Narrative* 37)

As Bernier suggests, Douglass detached himself from his experiences in slavery into a “dreamlike status”, seemingly making himself an observer rather than experiencer.

Bernier further explains how Douglass was only “able to live with the memory of slavery [...] if it was consigned beyond the pale of actual experience” (37). However, I would suggest that by *My Bondage* Douglass had found space to discuss the trauma of slavery as an experiencer as much as an observer, time having allowed him to detach from the overwhelming emotional burden and provide perspective. *My Bondage* thus gave Douglass a venue where to bring in concord the image of a fugitive slave and the heroic liberator without being merely a “graduate from the peculiar institution” (Douglass, *My Bondage* 288).

Douglass came to understand the purpose of his first *Narrative* was not to relay the conflicts and concords of his inner persona but to advise the audience of the horrors of slavery. *My Bondage* finally allowed him to emphasize less the cruelties of slavery and to focus on foregrounding how these events of personal and witnessed horrors contributed to his growth as a man and a performer. With long investigative chapters, as “it is always a fact of some importance to know where a *man* is born” (Douglass, *My Bondage* 30; emphasis mine), Douglass is able to affirm the philosophical transformation that had taken place within the decade between his two narratives, as through *My Bondage* Douglass was able to explore more his emotional journey of “the chattel becom[ing] a man!” (297), once more asserting Douglass’s Black heroic masculinity in his own self-representation of his evolving mentality through his experiences. For example, in *My Bondage* Douglass analyzes how having been loved and having loved in return as a child, as an adult he was able to understand that “the equality of nature is strongly asserted in childhood, and childhood requires children for associates. *Color* makes no difference to a child” (63; emphasis in original). Furthermore, Douglass recalls how the subjected conditions and nature of slavery destroyed families, recalling how “brothers and sisters we were by blood; but slavery had made us strangers. I heard the words brother and sisters, and knew they must mean something; but slavery had robbed these terms of their true meaning” (41). However, growing up with a loving family as long as he did, for Douglass “it was a long time before I knew myself to be a slave. I knew many other things before I knew that” (33). This is a pivotal element in growth of Douglass the man, as from a young age he was able to distinguish his humanity beyond his condition as a slave. For Douglass, the first events that truly “opened [his] eyes to the cruelty and wickedness of slavery” (67) were the brutal beatings of two slave women, his own cousin (unnamed) and Esther. In the *Narrative*, Douglass recognizes this “glaring odiousness” (Douglass, *Narrative* 94) of the suffering of the slave women as the “gratification of [slaveholders] wicked desires [is made] profitable as well as pleasurable” (94). In *My Bondage*, Douglass turns this judgment into a religious offence;

in all its glaring odiousness [...] this arrangement<sup>1</sup> admits of the greatest license to brutal slaveholders, and their profligate sons, brothers, relations and friends, and gives to the pleasure of sin, the additional attraction for profit. (49)

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<sup>1</sup> Arrangement of children of slave women having to follow the condition of their mothers.

Douglass affirms a moral and a Christian high ground over the slaveholder, as by now he had become involved in woman's rights advocacy, this passage asserts his solidarity, stating how "the slave-woman is at the mercy of the fathers, sons or brothers of her master. The thoughtful know the rest." (Douglass, *My Bondage* 50).

James Matlack claimed Douglass's first *Narrative* was a "symbolic gesture of near-defiance, an assertion of independence from certain kind of psychological and role-playing bondage perpetuated by those whites who were most insistently proclaiming freedom of Negro Americans" (Matlack 17). With the diminutive "pamphlet" Douglass confirms what *Narrative* actually was, was an assertion of universal experiences of slavery with him becoming a physical example, displayed on the abolitionist platform for his "diploma written on [his] back" (Douglass, *My Bondage* 288). For Matlack, *My Bondage's* "major changes in style and structure highlight by comparison the merits of the earlier, shorter version" (23). What Matlack fails to acknowledge is the white paratextual enveloping that got *Narrative* written and published, falling short of grasping Douglass's conscious move away from the propaganda style of his first *Narrative*, in favor of a literary autobiography that served for the chattel becoming a man. What Matlack calls padding (24) is actually Douglass taking control of his life's story as Douglass introduced a new black envelope where he emphasized genuine reflection of his innermost thoughts, emotions and even recollections of places, names and time beyond the limited role offered to him by the abolitionist circuit asking him to "give the facts" (Douglass, *My Bondage* 289) and to let them "take care of the philosophy" (289). Instead, in *My Bondage*, Douglass recognizes the conflict of how "the slave is a subject, subjected by others; the slaveholder is a subject, but he is the author of his own subjection" (86).

As opposed to Matlack, in the introduction David Blight labels *My Bondage* a "illusive exercise in memory retrieval and *creation*" (xi; emphasis mine), a masterful work of literary art "that became a testament to the value of words to both thwart and explain a world in which millions of people claimed the right to hold other millions as property" (xi). The word "creation" in connection to Douglass's autobiography is key with and within *My Bondage*, Douglass was creating an image, distinct and individual, separate from 1845's fugitive slave who had been reliant on white paratext for survival. Also, what Blight exerts is the uniqueness of Douglass taking control of his life's story, thus representing the self above and beyond the identities imposed on former slaves. Douglass's confidence and agency were becoming clear through the re-visitations and

revisions of his life's events, as Douglass emphatically states; "In teaching me the alphabet, in the days of her simplicity and kindness, my mistress had given me the "inch", and now, no ordinary precaution could prevent me from the taking the "ell" (Douglass, *My Bondage* 125). By writing *My Bondage* as distinctly evolved in style, tone and content from the *Narrative*, Douglass was taking his ell in abundance. However, interestingly, in *My Bondage*, Douglass still "gives us primarily the controlled public man" (xii), a man who has become used to adapt his performances to suit the purpose for various platforms. This is further emphasized by the added Appendix section where Douglass wanted to exhibit, as Blight states, "his prowess as an orator [proving] he had become very much the performer of the abolitionist message, man who had converted his love of words into a weapon of public persuasion" (xii). The Appendix as a section consisting mostly of reproductions of his own speeches and articles, was another method to revisit the public persona Douglass wished to extend. Therefore, rather than expanding his self through the words of others – more so, rather than allowing himself to be represented through a white lens – Douglass employed the Appendix to strengthen the persona he had created. By writing and re-writing his own words, he ensured he held the control, no misinterpretation of an image he wished to represent.

In conflict with Douglass's *My Bondage*, Truth's *Narrative* was, indeed, a pamphlet. Truth sold her *Narrative* at abolitionist, woman's rights and other conventions and meetings as much to spread her message as, or more so, to support herself financially. Being illiterate, Truth was unable to pen down her experiences in her own hand, therefore textually she would always remain mediated and interpreted through same white lenses Douglass was attempting to distance himself from. Yet it was the pieces added to her 'Book of Life' that create a truer narrative of the person-Truth. Truth used her appendices in the 'Book of Life' as means to deliberately reaffirm her public persona through the words of others, therefore as method of self-representation is in direct conflict with the methods of Douglass's self-bolstering Appendices. This 'Book of Life' was a collection of correspondences, articles, reviews, reports of public appearances with signatories and anecdotes from her supporters that Truth herself found important. These were meticulously gathered in Truth's own scrapbooks in order to obscure the white lens of her *Narrative*. They later reproduced in the 'Book of Life' to provide verification of Truth's life's story among the readers who surely would recognize the names and newspapers appearing in this generous final section (Mandziuk "Grotesque and Ludicrous" 470; Grigsby 120; Rohrbach "Shadow and Substance" 94). Similarly, as *My Bondage* and its Appendices gave

Douglass more control over his self-representation in the public, the 'Book of Life' gave the illiterate Truth an element of control, a chance to inject some of herself back into her *Narrative* which had been overwhelmed by the white, feminist, abolitionist paratext. By trusting "her scribe to make the selections" (Truth 171), Truth would still retain control, as she had collated the items in her scrapbook in the first place. Truth would have known what each piece was and how they worked towards a specific self-image she wished to represent. Especially the inclusion of Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Libyan Sibyl" article on meeting Truth in 1864, and Frances Gage's over-the-top Southern dialect rendition of Truth's famous "Arn't I a Woman" speech<sup>2</sup> speaks volumes of how Truth wished to be represented. She knew the popularity of these two renditions, therefore they became integral to a conscious construction of an image Truth approved. Another text in the Book of Life, where writer J.A.D echoes what had been expressed in the *Narrative* twice already (Truth 31; 41), is how "[n]o pen, however, can give an adequate idea of Sojourner Truth [...] her soul like fire, has magnetic power over an audience perfectly astounding" (Truth 100). Through testimonials such as these it can be seen how Truth had grown to her agency in Frances Titus' version, having owned the public opinion and made it hers.

Nell Irvin Painter affirms the dictation of *Narrative* "marks a turning point in the biography of Sojourner Truth her first step into deliberate representation of self" (110). As Truth relates events and feelings of growth she deemed significant to development of her the story, she would also omit recollections she felt needed to be "pass[ed] over in silence; some from motives of delicacy, and others, because the relation of them might inflict undeserved pain on some now living" (Truth 20). Omitting details empowered Truth to remain, even textually, in control of her self-representation, projecting perhaps a more sanitized (Mabee 6; Painter "Life and Memory" 13) concord with her past and present. In the *Narrative*, as a way of disclaimer, it was stated how "there are some hard things that crossed [Truth's] life while in slavery, that she had no desire to publish" (Truth 55) because "they are not all for the public ear, from their very nature [...] it would seem to others, especially the uninitiated, so unaccountable, so unreasonable, and what is usually called so unnatural" (56) that she did not "wish to say anything to destroy [her] *own character for veracity*, though what [she] say[s] is strictly true" (56; emphases mine). Truth was conscious of how some of her experiences would be

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<sup>2</sup> Originally delivered in Akron, Ohio in 1851 yet reproduced by Gage only in 1864, casting doubt to its accuracy.

received by audiences and was mindful to not include anything that could blemish her persona. The deliberate choices of rememories as expressed in the *Narrative* enables us to understand the construction of her image.

In the introduction to the *Narrative*, Painter scrutinizes how Truth's *Narrative* conflicts from the "classic ex-slave narrative" (xii) – attributes of which Douglass's *My Bondage* mostly still adhered to. Painter asserts as "Truth was not a Southern plantation slave, her story lacks the stock characters of cruel master and brave fugitive and the narrative traces Truth's religious itinerary more clearly than the evils of slavery" (xii). Olive Gilbert, Truth's first scribe, inserts much more of her own anti-slavery ideology, instead of Truth's, into the *Narrative*, which her second scribe, Frances Titus, leaves largely intact. One of the earliest examples of Gilbert's intrusion in the *Narrative* is the description of the auction, as Truth and her parents were to be sold among the "slaves, horses, and other cattle of Charles Ardingburgh" (Truth 12; sic). Gilbert at length describes the moment and the impact for the elderly couple, who "had never been separated before" (13), "though ignorant, helpless, crushed in spirit, and weighed down in hardship and cruel bereavement, they were still *human*, and their *human* hearts beat within them" (13; emphases mine). The scribes, on behalf of Truth, ensure that humanity of her subject remains intact, especially when Truth, as explained by Bernier, "a *humanist* to the very core, [...] rejects artificial hierarchies that endorse intellectual qualifications as a prerequisite to equal rights" (*Characters of Blood* 226). Bernier confirms how, even though it is scribes voice at the front, it is the emotions and experiences of Truth that are at the core of the *Narrative*'s recounted events. As the scribes' personal opinions heavy-handedly envelope such moments prove how heavily mediated (Truth xii) the *Narrative* as a text is. The ghostwriters' objectives are not forgotten as throughout the *Narrative* there is switching between first and third person narration (xii). For example, in discussing events and the sensibilities they stirred such as the passage;

With what feelings must slaveholders expect *us* to listen to their horror of amalgamation in prospect, while they are well aware that *we* know how calmly and quietly they contemplate the present state of licentiousness their own wicked laws have created ... Slaveholders appear to *me* to take same notice of the vices of the slave, as one does of the vicious disposition of his horse. (Truth 25; emphases mine)

The "us" and "me" in this text seemingly removes Truth's agency from the *Narrative*, shifts the purpose to anti-slavery propaganda instead of a life's story. The scribe here

manages to append “her own indictment of Southern slavery” (Truth xvii), rendering Truth a text for the cause, as also Douglass had initially felt himself to be when writing his own narrative of the “American Slave”. Painter affirms where “Truth exonerates, [...] Gilbert contradicts Truth in a lengthy sermon on slaveowners’ cruelties and the humanity of slaves” (xvii), thus drawing attention to how Truth’s own voice was lost in the *Narrative* when she was employed as the body of evidence. Painter recognizes Truth’s opinion on the “poor slaveholder”<sup>3</sup> (Fitch and Mandziuk 139) who needed the slave’s, the abolitionist’s and the Christian mankind’s pitying, for it “troubled [her] more than anything else [as] God will take care of the poor trampled slave” (139) as the slaveholder would be left behind. The *Narrative*’s preachy and in parts judgmental tone, therefore, separates the person-Truth from the text. The distancing third person leaves a sense of non-presence, as if the story of Truth is a fictional one, made up to drive the cause. Proving once more, as discussed above, how Truth’s ‘Book of Life’ is essential in understanding what Truth wished to represent to the public as the self. Occasionally though, Gilbert does seemingly grant space for Truth’s own views on similar issues, such as when Gilbert expresses how

*She* then firmly believed that slavery was right and honorable. Yet *she* now sees very clearly the false position they were all in, both masters and slaves; and *she* looks back, with utter astonishment, at the absurdity of the claims so arrogantly set up by the masters [...] (Truth 23; emphases mine)

In this passage Truth’s own reflections get space – albeit being distanced through ghostwriting that inevitably would add interpretation to the meaning of Truth’s considerations. Importantly, the *Narrative* does concede to what we already have deduced; that “till by some Daguerrian art, we are enabled to transfer the look, the gesture, the tones of voice, in connection with the quaint, yet fit expressions used, and the spirit-stirring animation that, at such time, pervades all she says” (Truth 31). Truth’s inimitable persona remained un-representable in textual form, as “no adequate idea of [her] can be written while the tones and manner remain inexpressible” (41). This very concept gives way to Truth’s own dislike of textual material (Grigsby 109) in favor of oratorical performance or photographic portraiture to represent herself more accurately and giving her more power and control of her own imagining.

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<sup>3</sup> From Truth’s speech delivered March 15, 1851 in Rochester, New York, and as reported in the *Liberator* in April 4, of the same year. (Fitch and Mandziuk 139)

Painter describes how “in late middle age, Sojourner Truth emerges from her *Narrative* as a complex individual, a mixture of brightness and shadow” (Truth 112). She is furthermore described by Olive Gilbert and Frances Titus to possess “energy of a naturally powerful mind – the fearlessness and *child-like simplicity of one untrammelled by education or conventional customs*” (83; 112; emphasis mine). This perception of child-like simplicity is problematic as its leaving out the cognizance of Truth, concordant with Douglass, to manipulate the imposed caricatures, imposed expectations and her understanding of what was said of her. I would attest that the ‘Book of Life’ that provided Truth control over the textual representation of the self, whereas for Douglass the re-writing of his life’s story enabled him to reclaim control of his self-representation. The two powerful protagonists conflicted in execution but not in ability to represent their inner versus their outer selves in their narratives, thus inverting expectation, dispelling caricatures and subverting imposed identities, as discussed further through their assertions of agency through their speeches and portraiture.



## 2. Frederick Douglass's and Sojourner Truth's Bodies as Rebel Oxymorons

From early on Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth understood how photography's visual signification was a vital component in social and political reform. Douglass and Truth understood that the exhibition of their physical appearances regained means repossessing the minds of the Black and white public, as it was the very nature of slavery that takes art and imagination away from men (Meehan 131), leading a path to equality. As Bernier states,

Douglass was at war against the intellectual, cultural, social, moral, political and artistic damage [that resulted] from white racists attempts to commodify and objectify both his own physicality and the corporeal realities of the enslaved and self-emancipated. ("Visual Call to Arms" 324).

This conflict, or war as Bernier calls it, for Douglass and Truth was fought with their commitment to subvert white conformity, dispelling the idea of what Black bodies "ought to" appear like as they had been portrayed so far in slavery iconography. Through photography, then, they worked to invert the exaggerated and inaccurate imaginings of African Americans. In concord, Douglass and Truth were powerfully reinventing the Black identity, building on the existing iconography and stereotypes, inverting and reinventing them to suit new Black man- and womanhood they were reconstructing, as well as exploring how "art is a means to self-representation and to self-liberation" (Gallagher, "In Conversation").

Douglass was determined to "include not only deliberate interventions into slave narrative genre conventions and oratorical discourse, but also forays into [...] daguerreotyped portraiture" (Bernier, *Characters of Blood* 293). With the interventions, Bernier draws attention to Douglass's canny ability in his portraiture to conflate the slave into a man equal to the voyeur, and thereby "reject[ing] white dominant forces of black aesthetic and political erasure" (293), which can be seen in Figures 1 and 2 below. Reimagining the Black man as the representative gentleman, Douglass drew focus away from the commodified body to his facial expressions, his clothing and overall style. Refusing to be objectified as the former slave, Douglass had no recognizable signs of physical abuse or worn slavery cloth clothing, instead covering himself with crisp white shirts contrasted with dark elegant suits, adorned with clean neckties and chain of a watch. For Douglass the new art form of photography became "a tool to engender social

change and social justice” (Bernier and Lawson 9), as he embraced this new form to engage in conscious effort to transform perceptions of black bodies through art.

In one of his earliest photographs, Figure 1, the careful crafting of symmetry



Figure 1 - ca 1848  
Albert Cook Myers Collection – Wikipedia  
Commons

leading from the lines of Douglass’s face to his dark jacket to his crisp white shirt, with no contortions of features or exaggerated expressions, is a deliberate construction of a man separate from the ex-slave. The man in this image is, with his respectable elegance, reversing the black slave object into the black sentient citizen subject (Gates 40; Bernier, *Characters of Blood* 260), and thus, as Ralph Waldo Emerson famously said, annihilating “old indecent nonsense about the nature of the Negro” (qtd. in Gates 42). In Figure 1, Douglass seemingly reverts to the white supremacist expectation of a compliant

slave with averted his eyes and a humble disposition whereas in reality Douglass inverts these expectations with the recognized signifiers of white society such as his elegant necktie and suit, and the visible chain of a watch. All belongings a *slave* could possibly not have possessed. This separation of the inner sentience from the outer objectification was a trope commonly shared with Sojourner Truth. As Bernier confirms how “for [them], the ‘picture-making process’ liberated the ‘inner’ via the ‘outer’ man by providing a way in which to reject appropriating and commodifying discourses otherwise intent solely upon exploring external, physical realities of black selfhood” (Bernier, “A Work of Art” 299). As for Douglass, he understood that the image, despite its sublime ability to separate man from animal, man from the slave, was nonetheless just a ‘shadow’. Douglass employed his shadow trope to symbolically express his separation from the expectation of an image of a slave man, whereas Truth more pragmatically understood its ability to provide for substance as well as change

perceptions. Their bodies were shadows of who they were, represented to be and what their imagery would mean for changing the imagining of African American society. Malleable reflections to suit a deliberate purpose.

Douglass, frustrated by the white abolitionist interpretation and mediation of him

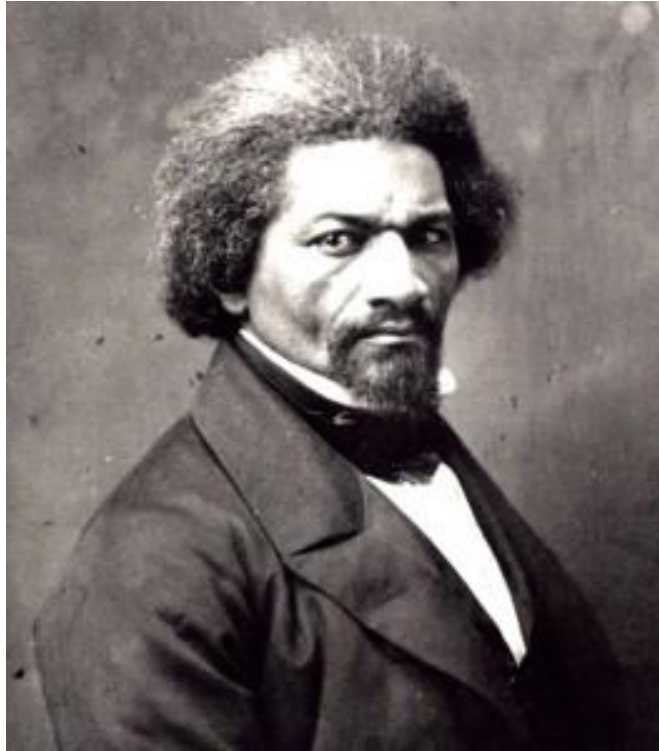


Figure 2 – ca. 1866  
Collection of the New York Historical Society –  
Wikipedia Commons

focused on certain aspects of his physiognomy in order “to dramatize his emotional, philosophical, psychological, aesthetic, intellectual realities” (Bernier, “Work of Art” 292). Douglass aimed for authenticity employed by his physiognomy to eviscerate the commodification of African American manhood and is often photographed with his eyes direct on the voyeur, as in Figure 2. By limiting the portrait to upper torso Douglass forced his voyeurs to focus on his face rather other physical features, removing the chance to interpret the slave instead of the man in the portrait. However, Douglass was aware that “the Negro is very apt to come with me [...] I

cannot forget him; and you would not if I did” (qtd. in Gates 29) as it was evident in the color of his skin and texture of his hair of which he could not be separated from. Nor would he have wished to do so, as ultimately, Douglass’s life was dedicated to being and remaining visible and true to himself. Douglass aimed to accomplish this by removing fabrication of white mainstream racist perception from his imagery by framing his portraits carefully in order “translate the archetypal figure of the fugitive slave into a liberated and liberating fugitive image” (Bernier, “Visual Call to Arms” 332) – the anti-slave, man among men.

For Douglass, if art is the projection of one’s inner being to the outer frame, neither one’s internal nor external realities can be fixed facts (Bernier, *Characters of Blood* 258). Douglass instead explored these potential inner and outer identities through his representations in portraiture. In Figure 1, the averted gaze, the neatly parted hair, the unsmiling counter all denoting how Douglass was yet to claim his place in society; the man we met in his first *Narrative*. In contrast, in Figure 2 we meet the lion, the incendiary public speaker who was unafraid to confront a gaze; the man he had

become by *My Bondage*. As Bernier discusses, in his 1861 lecture “Pictures and Progress” Douglass wanted to shed light “upon alternative ways in which to recover the otherwise elided complexities of black male and female subjects circulating in white mainstream iconography” (Bernier, “Work of Art?” 287). Therefore, his emphasis was to eradicate the scientific racialism propagated by the white mainstream as Douglass consciously worked towards eradicating the exposed and abused commodification of the black body in order to transform the black protagonists “from degraded objects into empowered, self-conscious subjects” (Bernier, “Work of Art?” 287-288; *Characters of Blood* 261). Thus, as Bernier affirms, Douglass confirms the strength and validity of the mind over embodied objects. Concordantly, Douglass himself had said that as picture does not lie whereas people, especially white people with agendas, do – yet it was nearly impossible for “Negroes [to have] impartial portraits, at the hands of white artists” (qtd in Bernier, “A Visual Call to Arms” 324).

By providing his self on display, Douglass aimed to displace the existing perceptions of the Black American men and to re-negate the American storehouse of anti-black imagery that had therewith aimed to “undermine the Negro’s claim of a *common* humanity” (Gates 28; emphasis mine). Furthermore, as Bernier explains; “[Douglass] was intent upon destabilizing and deconstructing the ways in which enslaved bodies [...] operated as sites and sights of physical and psychological erasure in the nineteenth-century white American imagination” (“Work of Art?” 289). In order to destabilize and deconstruct, Douglass focused on the construction of alternative mythologies for black selfhood – that of a self-reliant, industrious, educated family man, who would thrive if left alone<sup>4</sup>. With his reformatory photography Douglass articulated the former enslaved individuals’ right to be malleable and multifarious in their bodily symbolism, beyond the thus far perpetuated static and fixed imaginings (289). As Douglass’s visual rhetoric was employed across “the realm of the symbolic and the cultural imaginary” (Gates 28), his photography became “an act of imaginative retelling, recreating and reinventing his own physical contours to move in opposition to stagnation and confinement” (Bernier, “Work of Art?” 292). This imaginative retelling, recreating and reinventing the American Black man through photography became Douglass’s most radical act of resistance (292), much like *My Bondage* had been his

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<sup>4</sup> As Douglass asked for in his famous piece, “What Shall Be Done with the Slaves If Emancipated”, published in *Douglass’ Monthly* in January 1862

declaration of independence from former bounds. What with his invention Louis Daguerre had hoped that “men of all conditions could now see themselves as others see them” (qtd. in Gates 138; Meehan 160; Bernier and Lawson 24) instead for Douglass meant that now *others* would see him as *he* wished to be seen. This meant that once printed, his likeness became a reality, an undeniable fact and could be used to break the old caricatures composed of the black man in white perception. As Laura Wexler examines, Douglass trusted the photographic power over other modes of representation as “the camera’s unprejudiced gaze could undercut the slave power’s ostensible truth” (Wallace & Smith 20). In portraits like Figures 1 and 2, Douglass was producing a new type of an American Black man to replace the existing iconography as with photography Douglass was able to explore the “multifaceted construction of his own malleable personae” and to experiment with the “signifying possibilities of his physicality and physiognomy” (Bernier, “Work of Art?” 292; *Characters of Blood* 265). As Douglass said in his lecture “Pictures and Progress”;

The process by which man is able to invest his own subjective consciousness, into the objective form, considered in all its range, is in truth the highest attribute of man’s nature. All that is really peculiar to humanity – in contradiction from all other animals proceeds from this one faculty of power. (qtd. in Meehan 154).

For Douglass it was this understanding of art in its sublime force what separated man from animals. By having the observer focus on his face and his gaze, Douglass eliminated the need for setting as signifier of his status in society. The elimination of environmental signifiers, as Bernier insightfully explains, was “for fear of detracting attention away from his monumental and statuesque physical form, the outward expression of his inner complexity and his exceptional selfhood” (*Characters of Blood* 261). In conflict to Douglass’s fear, Sojourner Truth deliberately employed setting and props to firstly draw attention away from her monumental, Amazonian physical form, and secondly to engage her with the formality of nineteenth-century cult of womanhood, thus manipulating the expectation to suit her purpose of creating a new Black womanhood.

Concordant to one another, Truth and Douglass appear in all their portraits exhibiting as little bare skin as possible, therefore working in direct conflict with the existing iconography of half- or fully nude African American slaves. Furthermore, in their imagery there are no visual markers of slavery – no worn-out burlap as clothing or exposed signs of abuse, with Truth even deliberately hiding the hand on which she had

lost a finger during her time in slavery. Thus, Truth and Douglass deliberately made themselves the antitheses of the begging “Am I not a man/woman and brother/sister?” iconographies that prevailed at the time. Both within her performances on stage as well as her carefully crafted portraits, Truth deliberately challenged inhumane examination of the Black body as she made hers the antithesis of a naked slave woman’s body (Painter 196). With this deliberate construction of antithesis, Truth “deflated white tendencies toward voyeurism” (Bernier, *Characters of Blood* 225) of Black women’s bodies, “by herself by granting audiences permission to view her body” (225) as she asked them to see the muscles in her arm – or when she “not to her shame that uncovered her breast before them, but not to their shame” (Douglass, *Narrative* 95). Photography became a means to offer an alternative perception of herself as opposed to those offered by white mediation. As Roseann Mandziuk explores how Truth’s portraits “offer a striking alternative to the often grotesque, defiant, or devout descriptions of her that were available at the time” (“Commemorating Sojourner Truth” 277). Her portraits provided the woman behind the racialized reporting of her appearance, dispelling the grotesque depictions in favor of, as Douglass concordantly asserted, the infallible truth a picture provides. Mandy Reid contemplates Truth having deliberately claimed space as the oxymoron of her times as both black and a lady (Reid 299), whereas Painter affirms

In none of these portraits is there anything beyond blackness that would inspire charity – nothing of the piteous slave mother or the weird Matthias Kingdom, no bared arms, no bodice taken down in public, nothing of Stowe’s amusing naïf. Truth reveals nothing that would make her into an African or into an exotic of any kind at all [...] (196).

Contendingly therefore, rather than being a mere oxymoron, Truth was a *rebel* oxymoron of these concepts. Painter astutely states that a “black woman as a lady went against the commonplaces of nineteenth-century American culture” (199) which considered black women as domestics, slaves or worse – objects of lecherous male domination. Rebelliously, Truth was Black woman who in public challenged the American hypocrisy of slavery and notions of equality of race and gender, all the while with oxymoronic portraiture emphasized her womanhood without caricature, whilst enabling reports of her likeness as something easily associated with African Americans of the nineteenth-century<sup>5</sup>. Truth used photography to express self-fashioning – to embody an individual of great self-possession. At the same time, she could appear

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<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Cady Stanton noted how Truth enjoyed being read to the reports of her appearances, “to see whether these young sprigs of the press do me justice [...]” (Grigsby 109)

temperate and placating whilst her contradicting portraits image the establishment of an integrational icon “unlike any other record of her life and career” (Rohrbach, *Thinking Outside the Book* 32).

As Mandziuk asserts, Truth “was a deviant and destabilizing presence that challenged genteel definitions of femininity and subservient expectations of blackness, she was disciplined [by white recounts] by rendering these disruptions into grotesque traits” (“Grotesque and Ludicrous” 474). The cartes de visite were Truth’s way of responding to this “disciplining” and dispelling some of the prolonged misconceptions of her persona. One of Truth’s modes of asserting her agency into the photographs was with a copyrighted tag line “I Sell the Shadow to Support the Substance”. The authorial voice of “I” in her tagline, as Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby confirms, “underscored her authorship of metaphor” (124), as Truth recognized the symbolic empowerment of her shadow as much as the pragmatic support of her substance. In the very core of its meaning, Truth’s tag was not only a way of ensuring her legal rights over her own image and its reproductions, but also it claimed her “personhood’s complexity, its multiple positionalities” (Grigsby 125). If the carte de visite was missing her name and her tag from the front, “her characteristic claims to authorship and possession [...] first-person assertion that she sells” (Grigsby 140) were also missing. Truth was conflating the very essence of her previous slave-status with clever re-appropriation of language combined with her likeness, asserting her free womanhood, her humanity, through her “shadows”. Furthermore, Augusta Rohrbach asserts “Truth, who made a living selling her narrative despite remaining illiterate all her life, saw authorship as a way to consolidate her image and convert it into an icon” (*Thinking Outside the Book* 8). Her literary, oratory as well as photographic constructions and manipulations, therefore, were conscious efforts in building an icon she is remembered as today.

Figure 1 is purportedly one of Truth’s own favorite portraits of her (Grigsby 75) and showcases all recognizable and identifiable symbols of nineteenth-century womanhood<sup>6</sup>; knitting, book (potentially the Bible) on the table, scarf over her shoulders to denote her grand age with a Quakeress headdress covering her hair. This

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<sup>6</sup> As discussed by Barbara Welter in 1966; “The attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society could be divided into four cardinal virtues – piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Put them all together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife – woman.” (Welter 152)

portrait is steeped deep into bourgeois domesticity and has perhaps, almost an ironic



Figure 1 – 1864

Gladstone Collection – Picturing United States History, American Social History Project Center for Media and Learning

element to it (Bernier, *Characters of Blood* 219), which, when recognizing Truth's quick wit and ability to disenfranchise commonly held notions in her speeches is not far-fetched. As Bernier further suggests, these items, her positioning by the table and holding of her knitting, established an alliance of almost evangelical quality with the white middle-classes who were the targeted audience (219). She would have known how each of the items carefully placed in her portrait would serve to support the acknowledgement of commonality between herself and that of a white middle-class woman. This series of photos were commissioned just after the publication of Harriet Beecher Stowe's highly prejudiced description of her encounter with Truth, as well as the

subsequent publication of Frances Gage's racialized account of Truth's "Arn't I a Woman" speech. The portraits, then, appropriate both Stowe's and Gage's supremacist, fallible fancies of Truth and her persona, and enabled Truth to ride on a wave of renewed popularity. Her image in Figure 1 can be interpreted as deliberately unthreatening to white supremacist audience, strongly subverting the imposed identity as construed from the representation of Truth's persona by the two above-mentioned white ladies. Having on occasion been accused of being a man in disguise in her photography there was nothing masculine about Truth. She surrounded herself with universally recognized symbols of womanhood to emphasize her femininity and equality with all women, regardless of race.

Figure 2 calls attention to a possibility that the Civil War had "freed" Truth and her contemporary women from the Quaker symbolic garbs (Painter 187) and opt for more patterned, more elaborate and more handsome, substantial material in her dress



(187). This difference in style in comparison to Figure 1, confirms Truth's ability to adapt and recognize what a difference garments would impose on her image.

Her position here suggests challenge, authority and Truth making direct eye-contact



Figure 2 – ca 1866  
Smithsonian National Museum of African  
American History and Culture – Wikimedia  
Commons

with the viewer. There was no chance of ignoring Truth like this; and this image in many ways therefore corroborates many reports of her appearance and performances in public whilst it also removes the sibylline caricature. In Figure 2, Truth has also placed the photo of her grandson, James Caldwell, on direct display atop her skirt, and viewers eyes are drawn to it, as Truth would have planned. Grigsby discusses how "Truth's impulse [of adding the photo] may initially have been personal" (Grigsby 54) but this way, Truth was able to draw attention and play public homage to her grandson and his decision to serve in the war (54), as well to emphasize the sacrifice she as a black grandmother and he as a citizen of

America both made for their nation and their freedom<sup>7</sup>. It was Truth's public pronouncement for her sanctifying the war,

which showed her changing personal opinions once more<sup>8</sup>. And as Truth's personal conviction and opinions changed, so did the imagery she publicized, showing her ability to craft and manipulate the reading of her image. Yet, regardless of the elaboration of her dress in Figure 2, Truth's trusted scarf and headdress are intact, retaining Truth's owning up to suggested signifiers such as continuing to have her head covered in white scarf was a symbolic gesture of unity with her African ancestry (Rohrbach, "Shadow and

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<sup>7</sup> "Envisioning military service as the vindication of his masculinity, James wrote: "Now is our time, Grandmother, to prove that we are men" Truth must have been relieved as well as proud..." (Painter 182)

<sup>8</sup> Truth had previously been known to be fiercely pacifist, much in the vein of Garrisonian suasion and in direct contrast to Frederick Douglass whom she had directly challenged at a debate, yet now "she would fly to the battle field, and nurse and cook for the Massachusetts troops, her boys! And it if came to the pinch, put in a blow now and then" (qtd. in Painter 180)

Substance” 85). Scholars examining her photography keenly point out the lack of the mangled finger or the deliberate hiding of her hand (as in both Figures 1 and 2), which indeed is true in majority of her photographs. However, there are a number of photographs that showcase the disfigurement. Thereby she consciously re-connected the self she represented in her photography to her experiences in slavery, empoweringly combining it with the bourgeois femininity and domesticity.

By obtaining a copyright as early as 1864 (Rohrbach, “Shadow and Substance” 90) to her images and for the tagline at the bottom, Truth was able to subvert convention once again to her benefit. She retained control and asserted agency as in how she wished to be perceived, as she had done with adding Book of Life to the second edition of her *Narrative*. Rohrbach examines how Truth “used copy conventions [...] to protect her image and maximize profit” (90), and “by printing her slogan on the front [...] this calling attention to ownership” (90) of the photographs. Therefore, we can affirm Truth was making it impossible to separate the truth-of-Truth from the myth-of-Truth by ensuring her image belonged to herself, in sublime ideal as well as in judicial fact, as she separated the woman from the slave in a calculated act of claiming self-ownership. This act was physical as well as symbolic, enabling Truth to gain control of her persona in the shadow as in the substance itself.

The ultimate conflict in dissecting Truth’s portraits, not one truthful persona emerges, as she shifted through identities unfixed, in a deliberate unmaking of expectation. The two very different images as Figures 1 and 2 portray, hers was, Bernier states, “a body, identity and experience that not only refused to tell but engaged in multiple imagining narratives of being and becoming” (*Characters of Blood* 201). This experience of black womanhood, Truth reclaimed through “recognizing not only white but also black tendencies to objectify and sensationalize black female bodies” (203). Therefore, she exploited her photography to move from passive black female object and a victim, to a heroic actress in charge of her own fate. Endeavoring to work for her “signifying performances” (203), Truth simultaneously engaged in multiple assertions of identity – “in telling and untelling, being and non-being, hearing and nonhearing” (203) – in order to transgress and subvert racist, white discourse.

Truth’s portraiture became her signature – literally, with her copyrighted tagline as seen in Figure 1 – and there is a visible purposeful development in her style from the simple, “intimate portraits of the black female figure as a laborer or as a prophetic traveler” (Bernier *Characters of Blood* 219; as exemplified in Figure 1 and further

discussed in Grigsby: Part II pp.61-84) toward her “preference for the bourgeois markers of domesticity that were to characterize many of her later images” (Bernier 219; as exemplified in Figure 2 and further explored by Grigsby pp.53-59). The perceived evolving of her style and form of photography goes hand in hand with Truth’s growing confidence as an activist. These photographs of her likeness enabled Truth to establish “herself as a historical entity and an international icon” (Rohrbach, “Shadow and Substance 83). The substance of Truth’s photography provided a visual precursor for independent Black womanhood separate from white imposed expectations. She was carefully using her celebrity to advance herself and her causes, to subvert a caricatured stereotype as perpetuated by news articles, Stowe’s “Libyan Sibyl” and Gage’s version of Truth’s 1851 speech, as concordant with Douglass they additionally forged inimitable oratorical rhetoric to bolster a new Black identity.

### 3. Frederick Douglass's Sanguinary Doctrines and Sojourner Truth Keeping Things Stirring

Nowhere else is the conflict as contemporaries and as public figures as palpable as it is within examining Sojourner Truth's and Frederick Douglass's oratory and public performances. By the time Truth made her first appearances on public platforms, Douglass was already a well-known speaker, revered at both the abolitionist and woman's rights circuits. However, their styles differed distinctly from one another, as Douglass spoke more eloquent yet lengthy and often querulous monologues, whereas Truth excelled in her extemporaneous brevity and more evangelical in her doctrine. Douglass was meticulous in writing out, rehearsing<sup>9</sup> and memorizing his speeches in advance in order to be able to manipulate the audience reaction as well as prepare for any potential challenges or hecklers. In *My Bondage* Douglass reminisced how his "speeches in Great Britain were wholly extemporaneous, and I may not always have been so guarded in my expressions, as I otherwise should have been" (301). His ability to write and prepare his speeches in advance, in conflict with Truth relying on her memory and ability to be spontaneous affirmed differing attitudes in controlling their representations. Truth's extemporaneous and quick-witted style, combined with her performative presence on stage characterize an identity that was "discursively produced and never fixed, always involving negotiations of gender, sexuality, race and class" (Mandziuk, "Grotesque and Ludicrous" 481) as much as Douglass's was negotiating his masculinity and the ability to appear accommodating to both sides of the color line in order to seem conciliating. Their conflicting rhetorical styles came to face to face as Douglass recalls being challenged by Truth in public;

Speaking at an anti-slavery convention ... I expressed this apprehension that slavery could only be destroyed by blood-shed, when I was suddenly and sharply interrupted by my good old friend Sojourner Truth [...] My quaint old sister was of the Garrison school of non-resistants, and was shocked at my sanguinary doctrine, but she too became an advocate of the sword [...]. (Bernier, *Characters of Blood* endnotes 384).

Albeit Douglass's recollection of the "quaint old sister" shows a condescending conflict in the manners and oratories of the two contemporaries, Douglass does concede that

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<sup>9</sup> As he also had "repeatedly rehearsed and performed his *Narrative* in verbal form, thereby confirming the oratorical foundations not only of his first autobiography but of the majority of his writings as well" (Bernier in *Narrative*: "Introduction" 54)

Truth was hardly sitting idly by as Douglass exposed inhumanities in American Constitution or the hypocrisy of the slaveholder as “she too became an advocate of the sword”. Truth, in her own words, wanted to keep “the thing going while things are stirring because if we wait till it is still, it will take a great while to get it going again [I want to] keep the thing going, now that the ice is broke” (Fitch and Mandziuk 124). However, Douglass felt ridiculed by Truth for appearing more refined and eloquent than someone of his background would have been expected to have achieved as “upon his first meeting with her, Douglass did not hesitate to describe her not only as ‘a strange compound of wit and wisdom’. But as ‘genuine specimen of the uncultured negro’” (Bernier, *Characters of Blood* 248), however Douglass felt Truth seemingly felt “it her duty” to “trip” him in his speeches, and to “ridicule” his efforts to elevate his cultivation (Mabee 113; Bernier 248). Truth knew she needed to keep herself in the front lines, to “keep stirring” the minds and conversations of the American people, as much as Douglass knew how his incendiary messages would evoke reactions.

Both Douglass and Truth drew energy from the reactions of the audiences as they elicited empathy for their causes. Julie Husband identifies Douglass’s oratory skills as an “interplay between performance and word and between repertoire and archive” (Husband 21) since Douglass was apt in using his vast knowledge of politics, history and his own reputation to bring validity to his oratory. Truth rather relied on her knowledge of people, confident at standing up unannounced and speak from the heart. Roseann Mandziuk suggests Douglass also used imitation as a measure of protection from audiences that might prove hostile to him or his causes (“Grotesque and Ludicrous” 470) and was likely to emulate his appearance and manner of speaking to match the audience he was addressing at any given time. Douglass was apt in using this act of emulation to his advantage, as in his photographs he inverted racist ideas, detracting from markings of slavery in clothing or stripped body, instead focusing the voyeur to engage with his gaze. This act of imitation encompassed Douglass’s self-representation from the use of language and his dress code to his performative manner, all deliberately far removed from the image of the slave or minstrel caricatures so popular in nineteenth-century America. Ultimately, for Douglass imitation was a performance, his rhetoric relying on his knowledge of history and politics, intellectual banter, his own biracial appearance and black humor traditions (Husband 22) in order to underline the royal “we” in humanity. Douglass, the Black American, was as much an American and a man, as was Truth, the Black woman.

Douglass used tools like imitation and humor to become speaker he is remembered today, but it is the “sanguinary doctrine” of his speeches that further distinguishes him as someone capable demanding attention. A sense of humor allowed Douglass to build bridges and to thwart expectations, encouraging new perspectives of black citizenship whilst creating a sense of propitiating to white audiences. Douglass’s ability to engage in “subterfuge, polemical play and subversive experimentation [in order to] challenge the boundaries of *permissible* antislavery discourse” (Bernier, “From Fugitive Slave” 201; emphasis mine) drove his rhetoric as Douglass had an adversity to follow such “permissible” discourse. Instead, Douglass he had become disinterested from repeating “the same old story month after month” (Douglass, *My Bondage* 289) and he rejected the idea of only relating facts of his slavery experience, without further analysis, interpretation or advocacy on his part. In his “subversive experimentation” Douglass unleashed tongue-lashings to the mostly white audiences would not have expected and would definitely not have been comfortable with to hear from a Black man.

Furthermore, Douglass addressed the equality and validity of the Black man in America in his speech “the Claims of the Negro Ethnologically Considered”, delivered July 12, 1854. Douglass strongly states that “to know whether a Negro is a man, it must first be known what constitutes a man” (Foner 283) thus intentionally questioning the white audience’s prevailing hypocrisy on concept of man versus slave not being equal. Douglass calls out the folly of “the arguments directed against the humanity of the Negro” (Foner 283) by directly negating the animalistic qualities imposed upon the African Americans as “by the possession of certain definite faculties and powers, as well as by physical organization and proportions” (Foner 284) Black man’s claim to manhood is unnegotiable. As he did with *My Bondage* a year later, Douglass in this speech asserts his masculinity and independence separate from the “folly” of disputing African Americans’ humanity by affirming how “[a man] does not take things as he finds them, but goes to work to improve them [and therefore] tried by this test, too, the Negro is man” (Foner 284). For Douglass, “it is remarkable – nay, it is strange that there should arise a phalanx of learned men – speaking in the name of science – to forbid the magnificent reunion of mankind in one brotherhood” (Foner 285). One brotherhood, one humanity, was what Douglass considered as the due course for American future, for survival of the nation and its men – and by extension, himself. Furthermore, Douglass explicates how

Pride and selfishness, combined with mental power, never want for a theory to justify them – and when men oppress their fellow-men, the oppressor ever finds, in the character of the oppressed, a full justification for his oppression. Ignorance and depravity, and the inability to rise from degradation to civilization and respectability, are the most usual allegations against the oppressed. The evils most fostered by slavery and oppression, are precisely those which slaveholders and oppressors would transfer from their system to the inherent character of their victims. (Foner 287)

Douglass recognizes and challenges the arguments used against him both by slaveholders as well as the abolitionists in the start of his public career to emulate an unlearned slave to be more appealing to the white majority, seem less threatening, in order to fit the abolitionist platform text. Douglass makes a distinction between slaveholding oppression and other oppressors as a deliberate linguistic ploy to assert once again his own advancement despite the resistance he faced, thus asserting a manhood as an individual, not an emasculated brother. As faithfully as in his *My Bondage*, years later, Douglass calls out the prevailing hypocrisy of

even those who are sincerely desirous to serve us and to help us out of our difficulties, stand in doubt of us and fear that we could not stand the application of the rules, which they freely apply to all other people. (Foner 480)<sup>10</sup>

For Douglass, his performance was a game played as the Black American eloquent and emulating of the white expectations long enough to assuage resistance of his listeners, thus working to convert mentalities rather than individual moments. Bernier confirms;

Just as Sojourner Truth *played the game by performing* as an icon of black female domesticity to turn the tables on white female over adherence to the slogan “Am I not a woman and a sister?” Douglass pushed the representational boundaries for black masculinity to liberate himself and others from the potentially emasculating appeal “Am I not a man and a brother?” (*Characters of Blood* 261; emphasis mine)

The strength of his acumen is further proven as he broke “representational boundaries for black masculinity” during his “The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro”, July 5, 1852, speech. After a lengthy introduction encompassing the highlights of the heroic American history, lulling the audience to an image of a seemingly placated Black man, Douglass launched into in denunciation of American hypocrisy;

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<sup>10</sup> As reproduced shortly thereafter within the *Douglass' Monthly*, as he did most of his deliveries, to avoid any white biased interpretation and mediation reporting of his words and message, as discussed with Appendices in Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

[...] pardon me, and allow me to ask, why am I called upon to speak here today? *What have I or those I represent to do with your national independence?* [...] America is false to the past, false to the present, and solemnly binds herself to be false to the future. [...] I will, in the name of humanity, which is outraged, in the name of liberty, which is fettered, in the name of the Constitution and the Bible, which are disregarded and trampled upon, dare to call in question and to denounce, with all the emphasis I can command, everything that serves to perpetuate slavery [...] I will use the severest language I can command, and yet not one word shall escape me that any man, whose judgment is not blinded by prejudice, or who is not at heart a slave-holder, shall not confess to be right and just. (Foner 194-195)

With a satirical “pardon me”, Douglass relays his incendiary message onto an audience he had first reassured of a speaker appearing to pontificate the heroism which made America. Instead of celebration of American independence, they are confronted with, as Bernier confirmed, a man liberating his Black masculinity. He further challenges any emasculation in his speech on “The Future of the Negro People of the Slave States”, delivered in Boston, February 5, 1862;

[under the oppressive current state of affairs for American slaves] No wonder, therefore, that the colored people in America appear stupid, helpless and degraded. The wonder is rather that they evince so much spirit and manhood as they do. What have they not suffered and endured? They have been weighed, measured, marked and prized – in detail and in the aggregate. Their estimated value a little while ago was twenty hundred millions. Those twenty hundred millions of dollars have all the effect of twenty hundred millions of arguments against the Negro as a man and a brother. (Foner 482)

Here, Douglass calls attention to the disvalue of African Americans in nineteenth-century America. It is a suggestive warning as Douglass recounts the growing number of trampled African Americans soon will overtake the displeased white slaveholders. Douglass calls out the hypocrisy of American independence having been built upon all men created equal with the actuality being in direct conflict with America having been built on the back of forced labor and slavery. “They” in his speeches such as the above infers himself as he feels having been weighed, measured, marked and prized. Yet having since liberated his masculinity and claiming ownership, Douglass is inciting fellow brethren to join him. Through such incendiary speeches, Douglass was pushing the boundaries of permissible discourse by also “recreating, re-enacting and revisualizing the depths of [the] enormity of [these inequalities] to elicit profound emotional engagement” (Bernier, “From Fugitive Slave” 203) from his audience.



Douglass recreates, re-enacts and revisualizes this during his sanguinary attitude in his carefully crafted visual vocabulary is evident, as he calls on Black masculinity to assert itself in order to elicit respect and fear from the slaveholders and to bring end to slavery. Douglass is not letting even the abolitionists off easily, as in his “Speech on John Brown”, in Boston, December 3, 1860 Douglass states how he “believe[s] in agitation,” (Foner 419) and moves on to call out the prevailing hypocrisy of

even those who are sincerely desirous to serve us and to help us out of our difficulties, stand in doubt of us and fear that we could not stand the application of the rules, which they freely apply to all other people. (Foner 480)

Bernier corroborates how Douglass’s mission was not to only eradicate slavery and to endorse universal emancipation and equality, but rather it forged towards “to convert the white audiences” (“From Fugitive to Slave” 204). He wanted to change minds and attitudes, within and out of abolitionist and slaveholder ideologies through the multiple conscious acts of self-representation and assertion of his “definite faculties and powers” (Foner 284). Concordant with Sojourner Truth, Douglass’s conception of equality was not a gender or race but a humanity question. However, Truth’s and the African American woman’s struggle for equality was just at its infancy. Douglass explicitly connects women to his equality statement;

I was sufficiently enlightened [...] when only a few years from slavery, to support [the] resolution for woman suffrage. [...] When I ran away from slavery, it was for myself; when I advocated emancipation, it was for my people; but when I stood up for the rights of woman, self was out of the question, and I found a little nobility in the act. (Foner 709)

Douglass’s “nobility” in advancing woman’s rights, with the “presumption and arrogance common to my sex” (Foner 707), Douglass’s “support for woman suffrage is *strategically* linked to his defense of suffrage for the Negro” (Lemon 24; emphasis mine). Douglass’s advocacy for women rarely separated from the cause of the African American, and as such is both in conflict and concord with Sojourner Truth’s mission as a humanist to advocate for the emancipation of the race as much as focusing on gender equality.

Suzanne Fitch and Roseann Mandziuk’s *Sojourner Truth as Orator: Wit, Story, and Song* is the first comprehensive collection of the surviving and enduring records of Truth’s speeches – yet Bernier is right to be skeptical where they claim theirs is an aim to separate the myth from fact (*Characters of Blood* 223). As Bernier states, “[n]o clear separation between ‘fact’ and ‘myth’ is possible for such an orator as Truth, as she perpetually experimented with language to refract multiple identities” (223). As the

multitude of reports focusing on her physical appearance on stage rather than the content of her message, this separation of fact and myth was impossible. An opportunity Truth would use to her advantage as she remained an ardent proponent of orality, believing letters might somehow corrupt her unmediated relationship with God and audience, as spoken and heard (Rohrbach, *Thinking Outside the Book* 35). With reports and notes extending from the timber of her voice, the way the boom of her Southern plantation dialect echoes as supported by her muscular gestural performances, to her own displeasure of being recorded in such manner all contributed to the myth and Truth's own deliberate myth building. Therefore, Truth took upon herself to have a response – a critique – written for her, denouncing Stowe's "Libyan Sibyl" version of her. Truth wrote; "[...] The history which Mrs. Stowe wrote about me, is not quite correct", including repudiating Stowe's assertion of her ancestry and style of speaking (Grigsby 42; 113). Furthermore, American Woman Suffrage Association's meeting in New York, May 11, 1870, Truth had expressed her wish to be "reported in a grammatical and smooth way, "not as if I was saying tickety-ump-ump-nicky-nacky"" (Fitch and Mandziuk 175). By these efforts, it is seen how Truth made a conscious effort in maintaining control of how she was represented by others in order dispel notions of rhetorical inferiority due to her illiteracy. Truth responded to these inaccurate representations of herself in order to invert how she was supposed to sound, behave and appear like as a Black woman in nineteenth-century America. As a woman and as African American, Truth was expected to fall in specific categories of identity and she made her outward appearance a deliberate construction to seemingly propitiating to these expectations. However, her oratory in concord with her imagery proves her obvious myth-building as a ploy to sink in the persona she had built into the minds and talk of nineteenth-century America. Her calculated appearance was contradictory to the performance of her messages, which embody Truth's deliberate obfuscating of imposed expectations, asserting her agency and her power back to her own hands. As exemplified especially in speeches advocating woman's right – or more so, especially "colored" woman's rights.

Time and again, Truth did not let her audiences forget her race or gender, unlike Douglass who, as discussed above, was able and willing to use his obvious biracialism to his advantage, to use the unified "we" to denote all men, black and white alike. In contrast, Truth, as reported in the *Broadway Tabernacle* on her Woman's Rights Convention speech in September 7, 1853, made sure *not only* to fervently advocate

woman's cause, their right to equality as well as to ensure that the audiences would not even for a moment forget, it was a "colored" woman speaking to them. In the speech Truth acknowledges how she knows;

it feels funny, kinder funny and tickling to see a colored woman get up and tell you about things and woman's rights, when *we've* all been trampled down so't nobody thought *we'd* ever git up again. But *we* have come up, and *I'm* here. (Fitch and Mandziuk 114; emphasizes mine)

It is that change from "we" to "I" that begs to question, if it were merely women Truth was universally advocating for, or whether she quite deliberately ensured that it was the rights and equality of the "colored" woman that stayed in the forefront. Truth at the same time was able to assert not only her advocacy on woman's rights but also emphasize her identity as a quintessential woman and African American. By asserting a role, a performance, of a frail old lady she could soothe the audience in a false sense of security, before she would roll "her eye-balls in scorn" (Fitch and Mandziuk 113). Yet concordantly to Douglass, after first winning over her audience, she was capable of unleashing an incendiary speech, biting in its brevity, that conflicted her placating appearance. Truth warned how "I am rejoiced that you are glad, but I don't know how you will feel when I get through" (Fitch and Mandziuk 123), she went on to assert a direct challenge for the white paternalist supremacist notions of women's inferiority, for she had "as good rights as anybody" (123). Truth challenged the rights of men versus women and denounced African American men getting their rights before the women, as "[...] if colored men get their rights, and not colored women get theirs, there will be a bad time about it" (123). A confident inference for already being oppressed as well as suppressed under slavery, she would no longer refrain from any form of dissent as women together were "strong enough to turn de world upside down all alone, dese women togedder ought to be able to turn it back" (Fitch and Mandziuk 106). Truth considered herself possibly "the only colored woman that goes about to speak for the rights of the colored woman" (123), emphasizing her focus on African American women getting their rights, too, not only to help the movement's majority of white women to gain theirs.

Truth herself cherished her own spontaneity that allowed her scope and freedom to work in front and in concord with the audiences, eliciting sympathies without necessarily lecturing them. She has stated how she enjoyed performing her addresses for she herself "came to hear what I have to say" (Samra 166), all the while playing her audience's perceptions and

prejudices to her advantage. She would draw in the crowd, as in her previously mentioned Akron speech; "Den dey talk 'bout dis thing in de head; what dis dey call it?" ("Intellect," whispered some one near.) "Dat's it, honey. What's dat got to do wid womin's rights of nigger's rights?" (Fitch and Mandziuk 103). Here the intrigue is upon Truth's ability to connect with her audience by playing down her own abilities in a show of self-deprecating humor combined with the biting satirical "honey". She could also employ humor to subdue a hissing and shouting audience, instead evoking laughter and applause from those favorable to her presence;

It is good for me to come forth to see what kind of spirit you are made of. I see some of you have got the spirit of a goose and a good many of you have got the spirit of snakes [...] don't you hear how sons hiss their mothers, like snakes, because they ask for their rights; and can they ask for anything less? (Fitch and Mandziuk 113)

For Truth, the snake is the white supremacism that has caused shame to humanity and a fall from grace, not the woman, as she drives in her point of woman is due her rights. Truth further emphasizes the importance of women in the famous Akron, Ohio, 1851 speech.;

[...] 'And how came Jesus into the world? Through God who created him and woman who bored him. Man, where is your part?' [...] Raising her voice still louder, she repeated – "What did your Christ come from? From God and a woman. Man had not'ing to do with him. (Fitch and Mandziuk 103)

Truth calls on the hypocrisy of men using religion as their grounds for not granting women their rights all the while asserting her own superiority as a woman as she saw herself representing a mission from God.

In concord with Douglass who reproduced his lectures and speeches in his journals and periodicals to ensure his version of the speeches would encompass all others, Truth retained control of the image she wished to present to the world by ensuring there were plenty of reports of her public performance. Whether they were accurate depictions or not, she understood her celebrity position working for the cause, as already discussed with her inclusion of less than flattering depictions of herself by Stowe and Gage in the *Book of Life*. Ultimately "Truth's life is construed metonymically as representative of the experience of African American women" (Mandziuk, "Grotesque and Ludicrous" 468) since Truth herself ensured that the "abundance of commentary and reconstructions of her public performances [...] powerfully capture the race and gender politics" (467) as well as her gestural presentation ensured that her own reconstruction of her persona was at the fore. She knew she was the representative voice of African

American women struggling for liberation not only from slavery and the prevailing prejudices, but also for attaining equal rights together with the black man.

Evoking the Bible in her oratory Truth questions the audience's faith in the word of God and succeeds in shaming them, at the same time affirming her own belief of being on a mission from God. On another occasion she retorted how "years ago, when I lived in the city of New York, my occupation was scouring brass door knobs; but *now* I go about scouring copperheads."<sup>11</sup> (Truth 214) Once again Truth showed her quick wit and her authority of biblical referencing, bolstering her understanding of the political resistance to her cause as well the Biblical understanding of her audience, finding commonality to work from Truth's vivid plea for her race echoes the sentiments of others in antislavery podiums. Truth advocated equality based on the fact of how America was built on the literal back of slavery in America. In the 'Book of Life', Truth is quoted stating;

Our nerves and sinews, our tears and blood, have been sacrificed on the altar of this nation's avarice. Our unpaid labor has been a stepping-stone to its financial success. Some of its dividends must surely be ours? (132)

Truth here shares a sentiment with Douglass as expressed in his article "What Shall be Done with the Slaves if Emancipated", discussed earlier. Douglass writes; "To drive him away, and this deprive the South of his labor, would be absurd and monstrous as for a man to cut off his right arm, the better to enable himself to work" (Foner 473). As these two contemporaries would have heard each other speak on several occasions, and despite their personal opinions of each other, they shared platform of universal equality and humanism. In their oratory, Douglass and Truth skillfully represented their identities by seemingly placating to racial expectations in their appearances and use of humor in order to lull the listeners in false sense of security before unleashing their stirring and sanguinary messages upon the supremacist audience, in firm belief of reforming white America from ideology to action.

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<sup>11</sup> "Copperheads" was a term used of white Southern slaveholders who wished to sustain slavery and were often engaged in violent attempts to maintain the status quo they wished to uphold (Grigsby 28).

#### 4. Concluding: The Conflict and Concord of Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth

I prefer to be true to myself, even at the hazard of incurring the ridicule of others, rather than to be false, and to incur my own abhorrence.”

– Frederick Douglass (Douglass, *Narrative* 112)

“I feel safe in the midst of my enemies, for the truth is all powerful and will prevail.”

– Sojourner Truth (Truth 96)

Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth affirmed their dedication to individuality and self-representation through their inimitable words and deeds. Douglass, as quoted above, released himself from being used as abolitionist text as he desired to “be true” to himself, and *My Bondage* was his declaration of this truth. He emulated and adopted white expectations and manners in order to invert them to his advantage in reforming the mentality of white supremacist America. In concord, Truth expressed genuine control of her identity, released from expectation of a slave woman and became a concept that stood for African American women, in her part reforming white paternalist ideology. In order to represent these genuine selves, textually, visually and oratorically, Douglass and Truth strayed from the standard expected abolitionist reformist agenda as they subverted conventions of how African Americans were imagined and thereby imaged in nineteenth-century American rhetoric.

Douglass’s *My Bondage* subverted the expectations imposed on the abilities of a Black man in America as Douglass refused to capitulate to white supremacist or even abolitionist text. Truth’s ‘Book of Life’ served more to express the persona Truth wished to portray in public as she bolstered her image, her validity, through the words of others. They deliberately obfuscated the white supremacist, imposed expectations to their race and Truth’s gender through their visual creations, as they created new Black man- and womanhood that served to conflict the imposed stereotypes of African Americans. These new Black identities they conveyed through adapting common signifiers of white society, adopting them into their own images thereby inverting the notion of Black iconography of caricatures or begging Black person, pleading for the right to be seen as men and women, brothers and sisters. A picture is worth a thousand words, as the proverb goes, and judging by the sheer amount of surviving imagery,

Douglass and Truth both had their hearts set on by the abundance of their own imagined imagery to change imposed racialized identities of African Americans as white supremacy had, literally, stripped of the backs of Black American agency. By refusing to bare any signifiers of slavery, such as their whipping scars or Truth omitting to show her mangled finger in majority of her photographs, ultimately Douglass and Truth through their oral, textual and visual rhetoric ensured a separation from the mass of disrobed and gauged African Americans.

By planning, writing out and rehearsing his linguistic performances, Douglass retained control of his image in public and pre-empting potential supremacist resistance he would encounter. Conflictingly, Truth who was quick in her thought and natural in her biting satire, assuaged the resistance by her spontaneity that took audiences by surprise. Truth riled up her audiences as much as she elicited empathy by making them laugh rather than pitying her, whereas Douglass evoked audience participation through his vast knowledge of politics, history and the human mind. In concord they both entered into dialogue with the listeners as the communal elements of their performances enhanced their unique abilities to work the crowds as their agencies became inseparable from the constructions of their self-representations for specific purposes beyond their inner selves as public monuments, symbolic entities. Truth and Douglass both elided and emphasized their often-paradoxical self-representations and ambiguities of their selves as Truth as “an activist for abolition, woman’s rights, universal suffrage, and the rights of freed and working-class African Americans (Zackodnik 117) and Douglass as “part fugitive, part writer, part orator, part activist, and part politician” (Bernier, *Characters of Blood* 252).

Bernier notes how “Douglass’s performances as a learned male intellectual was an anathema for Truth’s anarchic, discordant and antiauthoritarian identity, as Douglass was more capitulating to white social mores as he forged a new all-black heroic selfhood” (*Characters of Blood* 249). Douglass may have seemed capitulating, but it was – as Bernier also notes – a performance, means to an end to create that new Black heroic selfhood. Same as Truth, then, performed the intimidating, sibylline Black woman, forging a new womanhood that was beyond domesticity or plantation. The inner and outer selfhood of the African Americans required an inward emancipation of their cohesive minds and imagination in order to find equality (Meehan 131; Bernier “Work of Art” 291; Bernier and Lawson 9). By being in conflict and concord with one another, Truth and Douglass were paradoxically able to evolve their performances in style and delivery, in posture and

gaze, in text and image, dispelling stereotypes, inverting caricatures in order to evoke a concept of a new African American man and woman, equal and inimitable in their agency.



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